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THE FREEDOM OF PERE MOSSY

BY MARY T. EARLE

With original illustrations by Clara S. Hagarty.



I sought for strength from the hills,—

It was there;

But alas, as I looked, and the world grew fair,

One came to my side and softly said,

“ How wondrous fair are the hills !”—

I fled.

A small farmhouse near Southampton. Late afternoon.
Père Mossy, a young architect in poor health, ordered to the country by his physician. Mrs. Sudley, an art-student. Miss Brownell, another art-student. A little girl with a banjo. Later, the mistress of the house.

THE LITTLE GIRL (*thrumming lightly on her banjo and speaking half in time to the music*) :—We are all invited to tea on the beach this evening. The girls from the art-village supply the cake and the boys have ordered dozens of water-

melons. Of course we must do our share. Père Mossy ?

PÈRE MOSSY (*his hands in his pockets, suspicion in his eyes*) :—Well ?

THE LITTLE GIRL :—The invitation is especially for you, because, you know the rest of us belong to the clan.

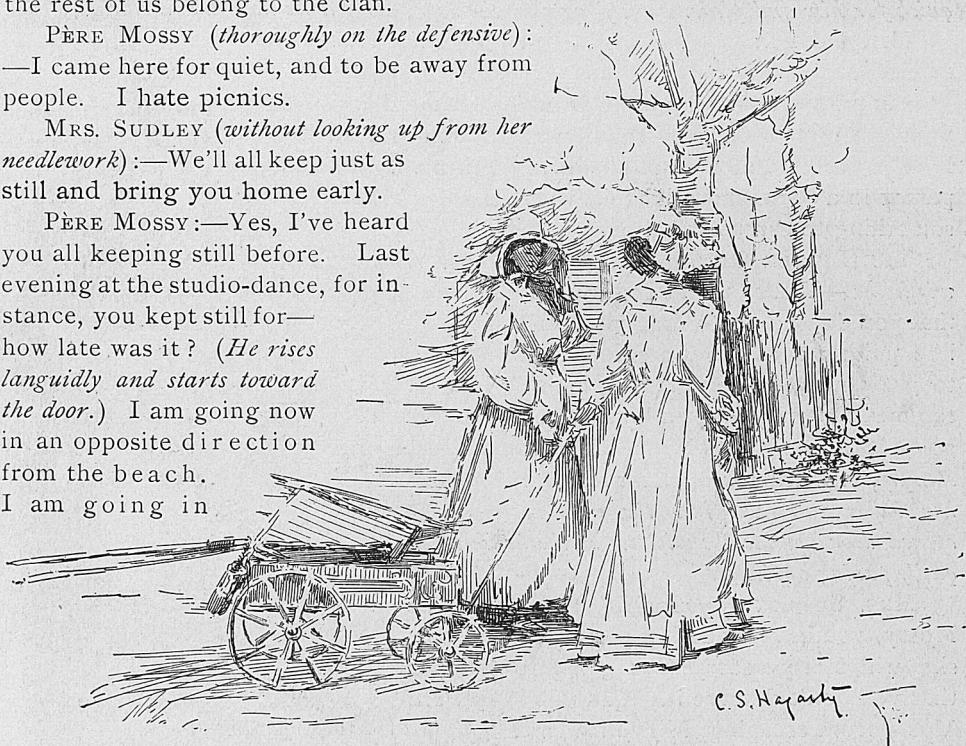
PÈRE MOSSY (*thoroughly on the defensive*) :

—I came here for quiet, and to be away from people. I hate picnics.

MRS. SUDLEY (*without looking up from her needlework*) :—We'll all keep just as still and bring you home early.

PÈRE MOSSY :—Yes, I've heard you all keeping still before. Last evening at the studio-dance, for instance, you kept still for—how late was it ? (*He rises languidly and starts toward the door.*) I am going now in an opposite direction from the beach.

I am going in



“WHAT GIRLS HAVE STAI'D OUT SKETCHING SO LATE?”



"THRUMMING LIGHTLY ON HER BANJO"

out of the window and breaks off to talk to the little girl. Look, dear, what two girls are those who have staid out sketching so late?

(*Père Mossy, unguarded, moves stealthily towards the door. Miss Brownell is too quick for him and places herself against the door, her palette held like a shield.*)

MISS BROWNELL (*softly*):—Mr. Mosby, what makes you so cross?

PÈRE MOSSY:—You might as well call me Père Mossy with the rest of them. That's what I am.—I am Père Mossy, porter and man-of-all-work. I'm a very desirable person in a community like this, where there is always something to carry or to drag.

THE LITTLE GIRL (*turning unexpectedly from the window*):—You're to be congratulated, Père Mossy, that you don't have to drag yourself. It's like pulling a cat over a carpet backward to get you to go anywhere. I think it's too mean of you, for you know you like to go—(*She realizes that she has spoken too sharply, hesitates a moment, then throws down her banjo and runs into the next room.* The opened door reveals the mistress of the house tranquilly paring apples.)

MRS. SUDLEY (*reproachfully*):—Oh! Père Mossy, you have made her get angry, and now she will feel so sorry! I'm going to tell her that you don't deserve it. Can you keep Père Mossy from escaping, Miss Brownell?

MISTRESS OF THE HOUSE:—If she can't, I'll

search of the utter silences. (*He looks uneasily at Miss Brownell, who does not turn from her easel.*)

(*Mrs. Sudley and the little girl spring forward and intercept him.*)

BOTH:—Père Mossy! Listen!

PÈRE MOSSY:—Well?

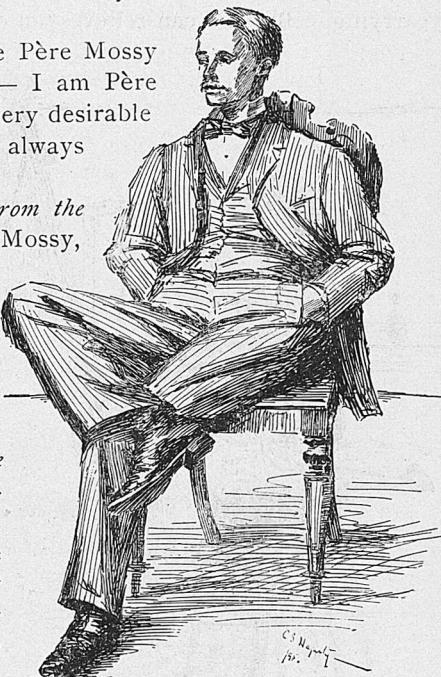
MRS. SUDLEY:—You're our prisoner.

THE LITTLE GIRL:—The clan will never forgive us if we let you escape (*Counts on her fingers.*) Our orders were to bring a peck of apples, two dozen lemons, a bag of sugar, a bottle of water, and Père Mossy.

PÈRE MOSSY (*sourly*):—You mean you were to bring me, and I was to bring the other things. You've got it into your heads that I'm an escaped Sandow, or something of that sort.

MRS. SUDLEY:—But you are always so good, Père Mossy, and—(*sees something*)

out of the window and breaks off to talk to the little girl. Look, dear, what two girls are those who have staid out sketching so late?



"I CAME HERE FOR QUIET"

help her. (*Motions silently to Mrs. Sudley to close the door. Mrs. Sudley goes through and leaves it open. Mistress of the House rises and comes to the doorway.*) If you don't mind, I'll just keep this door shut. I don't like to have the smell of the cooking get through the house.

MISS BROWNELL (*goes over to the window and looks out*):—How beautiful the great billowy stretches of green are in this level light. Do let yourself enjoy them for a moment, Mr. Mosby.

PÈRE MOSSY (*flinging himself in a chair*):—I had much rather look at you.

MISS BROWNELL:—At me!

PÈRE MOSSY (*nodding his head slowly and gravely*):—Yes, at you.

"WITHOUT LOOKING UP FROM HER NEEDLE-WORK"

It's queer, you have never asked me to carry as much as a paint-rag for you, and yet I've carried tons of paint and rags—for you.

MISS BROWNELL:—Why Père— Mr. Mosby! (*She looks down at her old painting-gown.—Gayly*). If you're going to look at me I must change my dress. And then I'll be ready for the tea.

PÈRE MOSSY:—Bother the tea! Come along and we'll walk off the other way. I've never walked with you. I've had to tag after the people whose things I was carrying. But if I can relieve you of anything—Come.

MISS BROWNELL (*wide-eyed and full of perplexity*):—Where do you want to go?

PÈRE MOSSY:—To the horizon,—to the utter silences.

MISS BROWNELL (*doubtfully*):—I—I'm sure I had better change my dress.

PÈRE MOSSY (*extends his hand solemnly*):—I know what that means. It will be long before we meet.

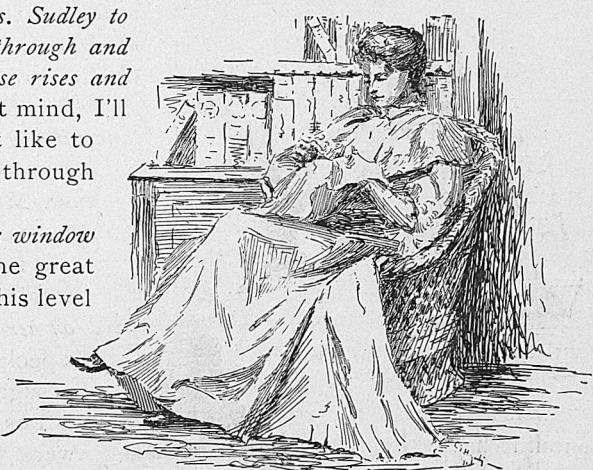
(*Miss Brownell gives him her hand mechanically, and he takes it in both of his.*)

MISS BROWNELL:—But I'm coming right back.

PÈRE MOSSY (*still holding her hand*):—That is only a woman's way of saying the same thing. But there is one respect in which you are different from everyone else. I shall never forget.

MISS BROWNELL (*drawing her hand away*):—What is that?

(*Père Mossy shakes his head and she runs away. Left alone, he takes up his hat and goes*



"MISS BROWNELL DOES NOT TURN FROM HER EASEL"

out. The Little Girl comes in and sits down, buttoning her glove. Miss Brownell returns with a wrap and throws it on the arm of a chair.)

MISS BROWNELL:—Where's Mr. Mosby?

THE LITTLE GIRL:—You let him escape. There he goes across the hill, but I suppose he'll be back. If he doesn't how are we to carry the apples and the lemons and the sugar and the water?

MISS BROWNELL (*sharply*):—You should have thought of that before you got angry with him.



"BUTTONING HER GLOVE"

and I'll wait for him.

THE LITTLE GIRL:—I'll carry the apples and give Mrs. Sudley the lemons. You and Père Mossy can bring the sugar and water. (She goes.)

MISS BROWNELL (*looking steadily out through the window*):—So that was what he meant. "To the horizon,—to the utter silences.—It will be long before we meet." —Poor Père Mossy.



"THE MISTRESS OF THE HOUSE"

THE LITTLE GIRL:—But it was you who let him escape. Don't you suppose he'll be back? May be if he doesn't come I ought to carry all the things myself.

MISS BROWNELL (*with affectionate warmth*):—You dear little thing, I'll help you.

You and
Mrs. Sud-
ley go on



"Mrs. Sudley"

"SO THAT WAS WHAT HE MEANT"

